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Guatemala

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Guatemala

History

Tucked among Mexico, El Salvador and Honduras, Guatemala is a country full of history. Farming and fishing villages date back to as early as 2000 B.C. and represent the beginning of the Mayan culture that dominated the area for centuries. In 1583, Pedro de Alvarado, sent by the king of Spain, conquered the lands of the remaining Mayans and took possession of the land. The year 1821 brought independence from Spanish rule but not an improvement in the lives of the Mayans. Various leaders and governments took power, and in the 1950s, Colonel Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán carried on the liberal inclinations begun by earlier leaders. The 1960s and 1970s brought many military presidents and an eventual civil war. Internal tensions rose between 1980 and 1989. During this time, conflict between the government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (UNRG) resulted in more than 100,000 deaths and created approximately one million refugees. In 1999, Guatemala held its first peacetime elections in 40 years and a new government was sworn in on January 14, 2000.

Landmines/UXO Overview

In an effort to maintain peace within the country, in 1996 Guatemala became party to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. During the mid-1990s, an estimated 1500 landmines were present in Guatemala, and in 1997 an estimated 5,000 to 8,000 pieces of UXO were present. Although it is not clear where all the mines originated from, some of the mines were planted by the guerrillas of the (UNRG). Despite this evidence of a land-

mine presence, a Guatemalan report states it has never produced, imported, stockpiled or used anti-personnel landmines and has no anti-personnel mines for training or development purposes.

Casualties

The number of casualties in Guatemala appears to be low, with no UXO cases reported in 2002 and only one incident in 2001, which resulted in the death of four children. From 1994 through 2003, mines or UXO injured approximately 15 people. Guatemala kept no official records of casualties before 1994. The United Nations Children's Fund/Association for Training and Technical Assistance on Education and Disability estimates that there were 177 mine survivors from 1972 to December 2002. As of the end of 2002, 240 persons had received prosthetic devices and rehabilitation.

Demining

As of 2002, 8,342 square meters of UXO-contaminated land was cleared in San Marcos department and 56 pieces of UXO destroyed. The San Marcos clearance was completed December 15, 2002, and the land was returned to the communities as productive agricultural land. According to the Organization of American States/Integral Action Against Anti-Personnel Mines Guatemala Coordinator, the clearance program destroyed a total of 3,460 pieces of UXO from 1998 to 2002 and an estimated 4,500–5,000 pieces of UXO remain to be destroyed. The Demining Coordinating Committee increased the number of clearance units in order to complete clearance of 13 high-risk departments by the end of 2004.



Reality Check

The Guatemalan government is working hard towards restoring an environment safe from the humanitarian impact of landmines for its people. These efforts are evident in the mine ban policy and mine ban convention to which the government currently adheres. Since May 2002, the date for completion of the mine clearance program has moved up one year from 2005 to 2004. The completion of one clearance program and the upcoming clearance of another section are a step in the right direction for Guatemala.

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